

# SOLIDAIRE

montréal, québec

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«Women hold up half the sky»

- Mao Tse-Tung

Women

and the Class Struggle

in Quebec



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## **Solidaire**

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## Introduction

Solidaire #6 deals with some of the attempts in Quebec to develop a revolutionary strategy for organizing women. The first series of articles deals with a theoretical approach to questions facing women working with women. The first article discusses one aspect of the problems facing women in the community-- the movement to build day care centres controlled by the parents and not by the

The following articles present a critique of the bourgeoisie feminist movement in Québec and of the theory of organizing housewives around salaries for housework. In addition, we reprint an article which appeared in Mobilisation (a theoretical journal put out for militants involved in working class organisation) in 1971, which tries to situate the exploitation of women in the context of capitalist society.

The final section concentrates on the problems of women in the workplace. The first three articles deal with factory situations where militants were involved in organizing unions. The fourth deals with the development of a rank and file organization in a paper box factory. This experience affects the consciousness of the women workers to the point where they walk out, with the support of the male workers, in protest over working conditions. The last article recounts the experience of the wives of the Firestone workers on strike in Joliette for ten months. The women set up their own committee to support their husbands and to ensure that they had a role to play in the struggle.

In Solidaire #6 we don't want to give the impression that the articles included present the total and definitive analysis of the situation of women in Quebec. One of the major problems we had in gathering material was the fact that there has been little work done here on the general op-

pression of women. However, we have tried to present some of the attempts of women to deal with their problems through the analyses of specific situations done by groups directly or indirectly involved. These situations relate to the problems facing women everywhere and to the question of organizing women in general.

We have put the emphasis on women in the workplace partly by necessity and partly by choice. It was necessary because, in Quebec, there has been very little work done on other forms of organizing women. This does not in any way imply a rejection of the importance of organizing women outside of the workplace but, rather, is a reflection of concrete conditions. On the whole there has been little theoretical and practical work done on the problems of women as women in Quebec.

We chose to put the emphasis on developments amongst women in the workplace because we felt that these constitute the very first step in the creation of a movement which situates women's struggles within a class context and socialist goals. Thus, these are very important developments for the whole movement in Quebec. As well-organizing in the factories is, in some ways, more fruitful because the socialized situation of women in factories provides a common basis for collective action which is not always present and which is difficult to create in the highly-individualized community situation. However, the development of an autonomous women's movement is very far off. Amongst militants in Quebec there is little consciousness of the necessity of such a movement, and organizing takes the very traditional male factory worker orientation. The question of the role of women is often ignored or else dismissed as a secondary contradiction to be resolved after the revolution. There remains a great deal of work to be done before



women take a strong role in the struggle for socialism in Quebec.

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In some ways, this issue of *Solidaire* is very different from previous ones. We have made no attempt to present an overall analysis of the struggle of women in Québec— if only because the women's movement, being relatively weak, hasn't yet developed such an analysis. The issue is the first step of a transition in *Solidaire's* general approach. In earlier issues, we tried to present a general overview of Québec's developing movement towards independence and socialism. This approach resulted mainly from our situation as isolated English-speaking progressives, coming largely from intellectual and student backgrounds, and was as much our own attempt to understand what was going on in Québec as it was an organized effort to present the situation to progressive people in Canada and the US.

But as our isolation from the rest of the socialist movement has decreased, we have come up against the limitations of presenting such a "general overview" in *Solidaire*; such an overview implies a certain political direction for the socialist movement as a whole. Since such a political line is only beginning to be debated by socialist groups in Québec, it is clear that *Solidaire* cannot alone anticipate it. Our position is simply that the development of the socialist movement depends on the increasing organization of the working class, where it works and where it lives. In future *Solidaire's* we will concentrate on presenting concrete examples of working class organization, both in workplaces and communities, as well as the theoretical analysis that develops from such work, through the use of translations and reprints from various socialist groups in Québec. This issue is the first example of such an approach.

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## Note on sources

Québécoises Deboutte!, a publication of the Centre des Femmes (Women's Centre)

Mobilisation, a monthly journal for socialist militants put out jointly by several organizations active in the Montreal area

Bulletin Populaire, a biweekly socialist journal of information published by the Agence de Presse Libre du Québec (Quebec Free News Service)

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# Part 1:

## Perspectives on the Women's Movement



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## Day Care Centres: A Political Struggle

Day care has been an important issue in Montréal in the last few months as the government cut off funds to the centres. They were run on Local Initiatives Projects grants under the make-work programme to alleviate unemployment. The day care workers and parents organized a successful campaign, including occupation of the Minister of State's offices to force the extension of government grants. The government agreed to extend the grants, but the problem of day care is far from being solved. The questions of financial independence and parent control are just beginning to be dealt with. The following article, written before these struggles, tries to deal with the problem of day care in capitalist society.

Recently the federal government refused to renew the grants given to community day care centres as Local Initiative Projects. The government is refusing under the pretext that these centres function without permits. So now it's time for each of the governments (federal and provincial) to pass the buck, like they do every time they really don't want to take care of the situation.

The Québec government could decide to give the permits knowing that the federal government will give some grants to some day care centres: it's easy, it's cheaper. But the problem would be very far from solved. On the one hand, the federally financed projects last only a very short time. It must be added that by creating some 20 day care centres over all of Québec for a limited time, the government is not really taking charge of the education of children and helping women enter the labour market. On the other hand, we know that the Ministry of Social Affairs has no intention of continuing to finance day care centres. Besides, the minister "is opposed to the Local Initiatives programme and when these projects end, the promoters will have to turn to Québec for grants."

It must be said that the priorities of the government are not the same as those of the population. Launching a true programme of public day care centres in all regions, in work places as much as in neighbourhoods functioning 24 hours a day, would encourage women to go to work. In present conditions of high unemployment, it is especially not in the government's interest that women begin to demand the right to work. On the contrary, the government wants women to stay at home but remain



available in case industry needs them (e.g., during World War II women were called to the job market to replace men who were at the front). This is how women assure the existence of a reserve of cheap labour that bosses and companies can profit from.

As for the federal government, they try to put on a good face. By accepting to fund certain projects for a few months, they indicate their generosity. By refusing to renew the grants, they indicate their cunning. In effect they are trying to say, "I'd like to finance you but you are functioning illegally," and "It's not my fault, it's the fault of Québec." But there's still another question: why has the federal government cut off the funds at this time?

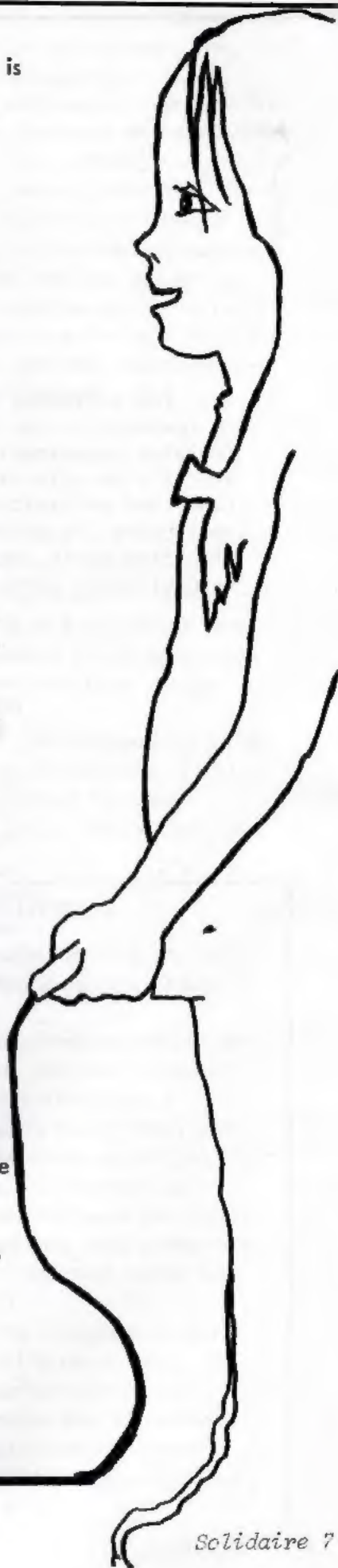
Meanwhile, the government's politics concerning day care centres has immediate effects on the situation of women in Québec. In this sense the problem is much more than a jurisdictional dispute about federal-provincial jurisdiction. Governments so intimately tied to the economic interests of the exploiters can't go against the imperatives of profit. To keep women in the home remains profitable.

What confidence can we have in these governments? We certainly cannot demand that they take charge of young children. On the contrary, we would have the right to expect this from a government of the people. But we only have to think of the educational system of Québec to quickly realise that day care centres organised by the state (capitalist and exploitative) would regiment children in a sort of "parking lot" where they would learn at a very young age the conduct necessary for their destinies: cheap labour for capital.

What can we do? Still the few day care centres that will continue to exist are clearly insufficient on the scale of Québec. However we know that there is a real need for them.

We must therefore organise the struggle, push the demand for day care centres to its limits so that all the contradictions appear. This demand is a long-term objective, one that can't be realised until men and women workers and housewives have overturned the exploiting class and taken political power into their own hands, which alone will permit us to organise society in response to our needs. We want free permanent day care centres open 24 hours a day, controlled by the parents, and in every neighbourhood as well as workplace. We know that a capitalist government will never give us this.

In the present, our work on the level of day care centres must therefore give women the means to organise themselves, to break out of their isolation, and to have the time and the opportunity to carry on the struggle against all forms of their oppression. This must be done without ever forgetting to bring up the long-term objective in all our interim battles (setting up day care centres in neighbourhoods, including day care centres among union demands, etc.), in order to expose the existing contradictions of the system and avoid all forms of co-optation.





# **Towards a Women's Movement: But What Kind of Movement?**

The following article was written by the women working on *Québécoises Debout* in response to the founding of the Montreal Feminist Association--a "non-political" feminist organization founded in Montreal by a group of anglophone women. While the specific details are not of great importance outside of Montreal, the article outlines and criticizes several tendencies within the women's movement which exist everywhere. It poses clearly the choice of dealing with women's problems in isolation from their social context, or else seeing them as a part of the struggle for a revolutionary change of the whole society.

## **FEMINIST TENDENCIES**

There has been a great deal of discussion about the "Montréal Feminist Association" since their founding congress in mid-January. It was begun through the initiative of a group of women who were mainly Anglophones. They wanted to assemble the greatest number of women from diverse groups concerned with the oppression of women, regardless of their analysis and their political orientation, to form a feminist movement in Montréal. The congress took place on the 20th of January, 1973. The meeting was supposed to be bilingual but in reality, took place mainly in English. 85% of those who participated were English-speaking.

Since the beginning, the Centre des femmes has opposed the creation of this movement and has refused to participate in it. At first glance, this controversy may just appear to be a family "quarrel". However, much to the contrary, while the event is not terribly important in and of itself, we feel that it raises fundamental questions about the creation and development of an autonomous women's movement. Thus, we feel that it is important to restate our positions and to explain, as clearly as possible, how these positions are based on an analysis of the present situation and are aimed at filling the particular needs of the struggle in Québec today.

## **OUR POSITION**

For us, feminism in Québec is still in its infancy. The media (radio, television, newspapers and magazines) has, for the past year, served up all sorts of "liberation" for women - to the point where the word has lost all its significance. In spite of this, the awareness of their oppression amongst women themselves is just beginning to develop. To call for the formation of a movement, as the women of the "Montréal Feminist Association" have



done, before a significant number of Québécois women have become conscious of their oppression and begun to organize themselves in their own milieu, will only succeed in attracting privileged "middle-class" women who are, because of this, cut off from the majority of Québécois women - workers and housewives.

Precisely because they are cut off from the mass of women and their interests, such a movement could easily be ridiculed and thus discredit feminism. It is easy to ridicule 50 women who undertake highly symbolic actions. It is much harder if you are dealing with a large number of women who are striking for their own specific demands such as maternity leave with pay, free day care, equal work for equal pay and so on.

It is clear to us that the oppression of women cannot be ended without destroying the system of capitalist exploitation. The women's struggle, while remaining autonomous, must be closely linked to the struggle of the workers. Without these links, the women's movement will be the prey of one of the many so-called feminist tendencies whose objective is to divert the revolutionary struggle of women into struggles for partial demands. The three principal tendencies are reformist, cultural and opportunist



feminism. Briefly, we can describe them as such. Reformist feminists are those who concentrate their efforts on changing certain laws concerning women (e.g. the abortion law) without a long-term perspective to the struggle, as if changing the law will eliminate the oppression of women. Cultural feminism concentrates on the cultural aspects of women's oppression (e.g. women as objects) - aspects which are only the ideological expression of the fundamental oppression of women. In other words, cultural feminism attacks symptoms and not the cause. Opportunistic feminism or individualistic feminism is the expression of women who are trying to carve themselves a niche in a man's world and who would like it to be easier - for example, career women like Elaine Bédard. These women do not question the social position of the majority of women and its socio-economic base.

These three forms of feminism are extremely dangerous because they transform real struggles arising from real need into partial demands integrated into the existing system. The "Montréal Feminist Association" falls into this category of movement. It tries to include women who have very





different analyses and perspectives for struggle but not with the objective of developing a more clear political orientation through the exchange of experiences and internal debate. The objective is to simply unite all feminist activists into a vast front.

This is not to say that we are against the creation of an autonomous women's movement. On the contrary, an autonomous movement is indispensable to the development of revolutionary feminism. Our disagreement with the "Montréal Feminist Association" is over the question of creating a movement right now by a small group of women cut off from the conditions of the majority of Québécois women. Basically, the disagreement is over the conception of the movement itself and the form it will take.

If we want the autonomous organization to become a strong force within workers' struggles and, thus, advance demands which treat the specific oppression of women, the organization must arise out of a regrouping of women who have already begun to organize small groups in their milieu (community, workplace, etc.)

### CONTINUE OUR ANALYSIS

We realize ourselves the weakness of our analysis in terms of the immediate tasks for the creation of a woman's movement in Québec and what form its "autonomy" will take now and in the future. The answers to these questions cannot come only from ourselves. Thus, we have decided to meet with other women militants in political and community groups to pose these questions and to try to answer them together on the basis of our respective experiences.

## Salaries for Housewives:

### A Critique

This is an excerpt from a critique on the theory of organizing women around the question of salaries for housewives. The critique was formulated by the women of the Women's Centre in Montréal, and published in *Québécoises Debout!*, (vol. 1, no. 5, April 1973).

For a while now, we have often heard about the idea of salaries for housewives, or a subsidy for the young married women and the new-born child. In this article, we will try to show some of the contradictions of this demand. With a salary for housewives, domestic work will still be done within the family unit, and will still retain its private character. The "houseworker", paid for this task, would be no less distant from any direct participation in the work force and production.

The sudden interest that certain political parties have shown towards women is significant. Aware of the developing feminist consciousness among Québécois women, the Parti Québécois and the Social Credit





Party are trying to develop a strategy that would gain the support of this important force. After all, women represent 52% of the Québec electorate.

Thus, the Social Credit Party decides to include measures for housewives in its programmes. Recently, Dupuis has been saying that he wants to encourage young wives to stay at home and he hopes to do this by giving them a subsidy to get started with: "The state has a duty to give young wives the instruments for saving the race." He adds: "Most women, if they had the choice, would prefer to stay at home than to be bored in the traditional jobs of steno-typist." Which means that, for him, the real place for women is at home, because this is not "traditional" but "natural". The motives of the Social Credit Party on this question are very explicit: to eliminate women from public life.....

The P.Q.'s position is more subtle; several resolutions have been passed on the subject of women. Among these are the decision to recognize housework and to pay "either one or the other of the spouses" who takes on this task: "this would return to the spouse at home the dignity of freedom." This proposition sounds progressive, and lets us believe that "one or the other of the spouses" could take on the tasks of housework. But in practice, how many men would accept to play the role of housewife, and how far would they implicate themselves. Their entire education orients them to work outside the home. It has been calculated that the average housewife-mother (3 or 4 children) works 80 to 90 hours a week. Everything leads us to believe that it will be the women who most often will be left at home.....

## BEHIND THE ELECTORALIST PHRASEOLOGY

However, for us it is clear that behind the Péquiste (Parti Québécois) phraseology of the "spouse at home", we find the nationalist ideology of "retour au foyer" with the eternal glorification of the role of wife-mother, this time through the expedient of pay for housewives. As for what this pay really be, there is only ambiguity. The P.Q. has just included in its programme the raising of the minimum wage to \$2.50 an hour. For the average mother-housewife, this would mean a weekly salary of \$200.00

(80 hours x \$2.50) : i.e. \$10,000 a year. It would be an illusion to believe that a government would pay the minimum wage to "one or the other spouse" who worked at home. No capitalist system can give a reasonable salary to housewives. In effect, the bosses realize a large part of their profits precisely because housewives do their work without pay. (The reproduction of the labour power of their husbands.) The payment of a salary to housewives would greatly lower the bosses' profits, which of course goes against the interests of the capitalists: the maximization of profits. At the most, a token subsidy could be given. All of which means that women would not gain total economic independence as the P.Q. would lead us to believe.

All these attempts to reform the patriarchal system and the family structure betray the interests of those in the race for political and economic power. In effect, the alluring propaganda of the reforms promised for women have a clearly electoral tinge to them. These promises could have remarkable results. Because, for once, the political parties are contemplating the idea of legislation determining the condition of women. Since the developing feminist consciousness of Québécois women is not yet reached a state of clear understanding of their real interests, these political parties can have a field-day in the manipulation and co-optation of the growing dissatisfaction of women.

As they have been formulated, the resolutions of the Social Credit Party and the Parti Québécois (more subtly) have as their real aim the maintaining of the division of labour; the men in the factories, and the women at home earning some sort of compensation. The end result is the institutionalization of our role as domestic and servant. It must be clearly understood that these resolutions mystify the exploitative relations that housewives experience, and re-inforces the repressive family structure, maintaining the isolation that is our lot and making more difficult all attempts to begin a process of the collective liberation of women from the patriarchy.

## FOR THE SOCIALIZATION OF HOUSEWORK

Fundamentally, the function of salaries for housewives is to slow down the process of socialization of housework. It's not a question of appreciating the real value of housework, but more of maintaining its profitability for the capitalist system, in both an economic and an ideological sense. The housewife continues to reproduce her husband's labour power, almost for free, and the family keeps its function of reproducing social relations. The industrialization of domestic work is indispensable, as is the creation of collective equipment and services, of laundry services, peoples' canteens and day care centres, open 24 hours a day. Without the socialization of domestic work, real socialism cannot exist, because this transformation touches not only women, but all society.

A salary for housewives will not liberate them. We can't leave the problem of our exploitation for others to solve. We must, first of all, define our own interests ourselves; establish, ourselves, the mechanisms for the destruction of the patriarchy and of capitalism which are the sources of our exploitation. It is for us and us alone to decide what role we wish to take in a socialist Quebec.

There will be a place for women in a liberated Quebec, or there won't be place for anyone!



# Class Society and the Struggle of Women

This article is a general analysis of the position of women in capitalist society, developed by several women who are militants in Montreal. The article, published in *Mobilisation* in July 1971, traces the origins and types of oppression faced by women in class society and discusses their role in the struggle to change that society.

If the reproductive function of women (to bring children into the world) has not changed over the ages, it is still not the basis of her position in the family. The specific exploitation of women rests on the economic role of the family in society, which in turn is tied to the development of the forces of production.

The division of labour between men and women goes back to primitive societies. Then, it was more a technical division of tasks and did not necessarily imply a difference of status. The tribe was organized into clans with communities of brothers and sisters. Paternal functions were exercised not by the husbands but by brothers of the clans, and the community of sisters worked together at domestic chores and raised the children communally.

With a mode of production based on agriculture and livestock breeding came private property. At the same time, the patriarchal family began developing; men wanted to attach a single woman to themselves to assure heirs and to be able to exploit the labour force of their children. "With the patriarchal family and moreover, the single, monogamous family, management of housework lost its public nature. It no longer concerned society; it became a private service; the woman became the first servant; she was thrown out of the means of production." (Engels, *Origin....* p.71)

In Québec, the agricultural family lived in a subsistence level economy. The women occupied an important place in production. Even though limited to the world of the family, they contributed to agriculture, in addition to producing various crafts and bearing children. This situation changed with the development of industrial capitalism. Families could no longer live off the land, so they emigrated to the cities, where the men had to sell their labour power for a salary in the factories in order for them and their fami-

lies to survive. The women, driven off their productive farms, became dependent on their husbands' incomes. So, as the men became dependent on the bosses, the women became dependent on the men.

Since primitive communities, the ruling class which have monopolized the social surplus and the means of production have used women to renew and maintain the labour force needed to accumulate wealth and profit.

## THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN SOCIETY

The family, as we know it in our society, is not a "natural" reality, but is a historical product determined by the transformation of production and social relations that led to the domination of the working class by capitalists. Despite appearances, the family is not a private universe separated from the class struggle. It serves to recreate the condition necessary to maintain capitalist production. A study of the particular role of the family in our society shows the direct relationship between the exploitation of women and the exploitation of the working class.

Looking at the concrete conditions of family life, we can see that:

1.) The family serves to propagate the labour force.

The family fulfills several functions (emotional life, education of children....), but its economic role is often ignored. At first sight, on an economic level, the family appears to be above all a consumption unit, especially since family farming almost completely disappeared to make way for industry. The family adapted itself well to encourage consumption, especially by women because of their family responsibilities (buying food,

clothes, household articles....). The family consumes so that its members will be able to work and thereby assure the welfare and survival of the unit. But only working class families must depend on the ability to work for survival; the bourgeoisie already has "capital" on which to live. The salary a worker receives from his boss in exchange for his labour is spent on renewing his labour power and assuring the upkeep of his children, who will replace him when he becomes unproductive (i.e., too old). Because household products offered on the market are often too expensive, the women must, as cheaply as possible, provide the unpaid labour necessary for the upkeep of the family.

Thus, the family provides for an essential labour: housework that serves to renew the work force indispensable to the bosses to assure production and profit.

## 2) The Family Renews Class Structures

The bourgeois family and the working class family are not in the same situation; they do not have the same resources. Thus, from the beginning, inequalities exist among children, which help determine how they will fit into their future class. (If you're born the son of a worker, there's a good "chance" that you'll stay one.) Today, the family contributes directly to the recreation of classes. It has become a small, isolated unit that depends on the resources of two people (father and mother) for its development.

The bourgeois family, as Marx said (Communist Manifesto, Chinese edition, pg. 54), depends on

capital and individual profit. The link between the family's dynamics and its economic base is blurred by the distinction made between the household bank account and the business account. This link shows up in legal contracts (e.g. marriage contracts, wills), where one can see the source of the money used for consumption by the bourgeoisie. The family allows the bourgeoisie to justify their consumption of luxury goods and their accumulation of capital ("It's for the children!"), while hiding the source - the exploitation of workers. It also lets them pass on their inheritances and assure the recreation of their class (the son of a bourgeois will not have to find work at the age of 18).

Working class families are dependent on the ruling class for their subsistence. To maximize profits, bosses tend to reduce workers' salaries to the minimum needed for their survival and that of their families. The struggles of organized workers against this situation can raise the standard of living above the minimum but does not change the dependence.

In this context, the family imposes burdens (family responsibilities) on workers for which they are economically unprepared. A worker isn't likely to have much of an inheritance to pass on; he can only depend on his salary. This salary is often barely enough for the family to survive on without going into debt, and the wife has to devote a lot of energy to stretching the budget. Despite the fact that work takes up all their energies, working class couples are also expected to provide a "good education" for their children. Often having left school fairly early, what resources do





they have to assure their children a better standard of living? It should not be surprising, therefore, that many working class children are often less successful at school and that their development is oriented towards their role in capitalist production. Moreover, families are often forced to withdraw children from school fairly early because they need extra money.

### 3) The Family Recreates Social Structures Through Education

Like bourgeois families, working class families carry the dominant ideology into the education of their children. Children are taught to behave according to the positions they occupy in society (the petty bourgeois learn to speak "well"). According to their sex, they are taught the roles needed to create new families. After this initial education in the home, they are confined to schools where they are taught the "savoir-faire" of their particular roles in the labour force. It is at school that a process of selection, based on inequality from the very beginning, is completed.

The dominant ideology tries to hide the true nature of the family by emphasizing family identity and "equal opportunity for all". The apparent legal similarity of all marriages and marriage contracts disguises the concrete differences between working class and bourgeois families. An image is presented of the family, with all its aspirations (one family homes etc.), as the MODEL of individual success. Problems that come to exist within families are thought to result from the couple's "not getting along"; the conditions of their existence are not considered.

The same attitude is shown in the various government schemes (medical insurance, family allowance, etc.) whose stated goal is equality for all. Such financial aid does not attend to the real causes of family problems (poverty is a cause of sickness); it does not provide enough for working class families to raise their relative standard of living. It does little more than slightly alleviate their economic hardships while assuring the survival of the class indispensable to capitalist production. Besides, these funds come from taxes deducted from the workers' salaries deducted by the state. No more is spent and each

plan is carefully predetermined. While ostensibly alleviating poverty, these schemes serve mainly to keep workers' salaries low and avoid class conflict.

## HOUSEWORK

### 1) Housework Is Restricted To Women

In our economic system, the family assures the renewal and upkeep of the labour force. It is therefore necessary to provide each family with certain essential goods and services (e.g. food, keeping the house in order) for immediate consumption. This labour, called housework, is restricted to women.

The traditional division of labour between men and women is maintained by a whole ideology that wants to keep women in the home: along with marriage, women must accept all the responsibility for children and housework. Even if they work outside the home, they are held responsible for domestic work associated with their biological function (reproduction).

Thus the majority of women are confined to domestic work which monopolizes most of their time. Their material living conditions depend on their husbands' salaries. If this salary is low, they have no choice but to increase their work day, either by lowering the cost of the family's upkeep or by bringing in extra money selling their labour outside the home.

The products of a woman's labour at home are immediately consumed by her family and are not exchangeable for money. Though essential to the survival of the family, this work is not considered real productive labour; having no exchange value and being cut off from the usual productive centres (e.g. factories), it becomes invisible. Thus, one can say: "My mother doesn't work; she has too much work to do!"

Moreover, even though women's work in the home is estimated at nearly a quarter of the national product (24% of the GNP in the U.S. in 1964), its role in the national economy is ignored.

### 2) Housework is Unpaid Labour

Housework, because it maintains the labour force, is essential to production and to the profits of the bosses. But it is free. When the same work is done outside the home (e.g., food, cleaning industries; restaurants), the boss must pay his workers a salary. Even domestics working for bourgeois families,

doing someone else's housework, must be paid.

In working class families, housework is provided for free by the mother; having little money, she can rely, at the most, on some help from other members of the family. The husband's salary pays for the work of two people. This economic reality becomes apparent when a couple separates and the man must pay his wife a food allowance. His salary is seldom enough to let him support a second family.

Unpaid housework can therefore be considered as a hidden tax on a worker's salary. The enormous amount of free labour done by women is profitable to those who control the means of production. It lets the bosses pay lower salaries and increase their profits.



### 3) Different Conditions of Housework

Conditions under which housework is done differ according to class positions of women.

There are several compensations for the bourgeois woman. She has the time and the money to assure her children a "good education". She can use household appliances that reduce her work-time. She can hire domestic help, repeating a dominating-dominated relationship. The bourgeois woman has capital to use to hire a domestic helper who will receive a very low salary. Working in this type of environment, the domestic is forced to conform to the dominant ideology; she must have "good manners" and a humble, servile attitude. She is expected to take for granted that she will never be able to use all of her boss's fancy appliances to do her own work in her own home.

Working class women must do a full day's work under poor conditions; a woman alone with young children could easily have a 70 to 80-hour work week. If the family income is low, the woman has no outside help and no gadgets to reduce her work load. Moreover, if, through economic necessity she must work outside the home, her work day is doubled.

### 4) The Private Nature of Housework

Though the responsibilities imposed on each family are indispensable to the socio-economic system, they take on the nature of private production, which is linked to the form the family has taken and its role in the recreation of classes.

Even though technology (in the form of washer-dryers, etc.) has reduced the time needed to do housework, this has not changed its "pre-capitalist" nature (individual production, repeated in several units, non-exchangeable). Technology has done nothing to really decrease the amount of energy and ability wasted by most women, who must constantly repeat the individual chores needed to keep their families going.

Even though various domestic industries (cleaners, restaurants, nurseries) have developed in our society, they have a profit goal and usually are accessible only to the bourgeoisie.

The social function of housework and the different conditions under which it is done can only be understood in terms of the family's role in the framework of class relations. Analysis should not be limited to the internal family situation, to the individual relationship between husband and wife. The exploitation of housework is the real basis of their oppression and determines the particular ways they will be oppressed outside the home.

### ON THE JOB

The rapid increase of the number of women on the Canadian job market (an increase of 62.3%) is an important phenomenon of the last decade. In 1970, nearly one-third (32%) of all married women in Canada worked outside the home. Even if part-time work is more frequently done by women than by men, still 75.2% of the women who work, work at full-time jobs (35 hours or more per week). As for mothers who work in paying jobs, 63% work full time.



## 1) The Double Work Load

What this means is that a growing number of women must undertake a double work load, for it is still the women who assume the responsibility for maintaining the house. However, the concrete conditions in which housework and a paying job are accomplished are not the same for all women. For bourgeois women, a job is often a means by which she can avoid boredom, and also buy luxury goods. A job is not an economic necessity. (These women enjoy the privileges of their class; they can afford a cleaning woman and a nursery school for their children.) For working-class women, a job is an economic necessity. Their children will be taken care of by a member of the family or by other means that will not bite into the scanty revenue of the mother or the couple.

## 2) Ideology Determines the Concrete Working Conditions of Women

In order to limit women to housework, we have developed a whole ideology (the mother in hearth and home where she finds her true responsibility) of which, the role is to hide the over-exploitation of women in the home as outside. This ideology determines the concrete working conditions of women in their jobs. Their preparation is mainly oriented towards work within the home, which gives as a result an inadequate professional formation. On the whole, the female work force in Canada is concentrated in (either in enterprises or in private homes); 17.8% in commerce, and 15.3% in manufacturing. In the last instance, working-women are mainly employed in the clothing industry (25.4%), in food and drink (10.3%), in electrical appliances (10.3%) and in textiles (8.2%). In addition, women are concentrated in the least prosperous sectors. If we take a look at the percentage of women in relation to the entire work force (men and women), women are found in the following industries: clothing (77.6%), knitting (68%), tobacco (5%) and leather (51.1%).

Of course there are a certain number of women who have managed to arrive at higher positions in the social hierarchy. We could say that these women submit to the effects of ideology (inferiority of women). But what we should not



forget is that the chances of social success of women, like those of men, are not proportional to their ambition, but are strictly related to their class background.

The situation of women in their working conditions is maintained among other things by the idea that the salary of women is a secondary salary, to be added to the revenue of the husband. This brings a profound inequality between the salaries of men and women, and has serious consequences for women who are solely responsible for meeting the needs of their families. An analysis of 56 trades indicates that always (except in two cases, separation of synthetics and dishwashing in hotels) women have a lower salary than men for the same work. In forty of these trades, men earn at least 15% more than women. Thus, we can see that the work of women in the working class does not allow for a significant amelioration of the family standard of living.

## 3) Women: An Industrial Reserve Army

Women are an industrial reserve army, which can be easily displaced depending on the economic conjuncture because in the end, it is the responsibility of the husband to ensure her survival. The participation of women in the industrial sector has almost always depended on the need for workers in those sectors. This reserve is not only constituted of women; it also includes all unemployed workers. In certain periods, male unemployment can be higher than female unemployment, depending on the sectors hit.

4)

Only 20.1% of working women are unionized; this is barely more than half of the percentage of unionized men (39.7%). The unionization of women is strongest in the civil service and in other public services, and weak in commerce (9.7%) and finance-insurance-real-estate (1.5%) which employ many women.

In certain unions, women have succeeded in having some of their rights recognized in the collective agreements (e.g.: equality of wages, maternity leaves) but the problem that women face in the work world outside the usual framework of relations with the boss, and their demands, should become a normal part of the struggle for the liberation of all workers.

In actuality, the consciousness of this problem is found mainly in the union leadership while many workers at the base keep their traditional view of the role of the work of women. But we must not forget that the workers, even if they carry and reproduce the values of the dominant ideology, are not responsible for the situation of inequality for working women, and that both working men and working women have the same interests of liberating themselves from the exploitative system which obliges them to sell their labour-power to a boss who makes profit on their labour.

#### 5) Work by Women Outside the Home can aid Their Own Development and that of the Struggle of the Working Class

The participation of women in social production (in the work force), gives them the possibility of moving away from the isolation and dependence that housework imposes on them, even if they are still obliged to continue the maintenance of the house as well as their paying job. This situation in effect clarifies the close tie between housework and work outside the home, and allows us to pose the problem of the specific type of exploitation of women as a problem of the working class.

The dominant class, the class of owners or bosses, uses the work of women to enlarge and consolidate its domination over the working class. They use the traditional division of

labour between men and women to justify the overexploitation of women on the work market, and to divide the working class: The entrance of women into the work market is presented to the male workers as a threat, especially in periods of unemployment (... women are taking away the jobs of men).

### CULTURAL OPPRESSION

The idea of the inferiority of women is propagated by the system in order to maintain the system of private property, the family and the dominance of man over woman.

Culture is therefore, an instrument of the privileged, by which the dominant ideology (the ideology of the privileged) can be carried and which at the same time reinforces the socio-economic bases of capitalism.

#### 1) The Role of Wife and Mother

It is the image of woman in her role of wife and mother that is the base of the cultural manifestations. Everything starts with this image, everything from her education, to advertising. It is always insisted that the natural interests and preoccupations of women are found in the home (education of the children, housework, interior decorating ...) or of course the relationship between men and women (how to please a man, how to keep your husband ...). This dependence of women on men (either within the family or outside) is recognized in law where women suffer from many inequalities (i.e. the situation of a separated woman, where her husband must sign her lease). This image also aids in a push for consumption: What don't you need in terms of clothing and cosmetics to please men, and how many things are absolutely necessary in a home for the family.

#### 2) Woman: A Sexual Object

From there, its just one step to the utilization of the woman as sexual object to push consumption, on the part of men as well as women. Advertising, profiting from the sexual frustration that the system creates in each individual, uses the sexual object as its main weapon. For men,



this "image of woman" becomes the object of their desire, and for women, it becomes the model they wish to resemble.

### 3) Class Situation of Women

Without denying these specific aspects of the exploitation of women, we must be aware that these aspects hide the real differences between the concrete situations of bourgeois and working class women.

Thus, for the bourgeois woman, even if her main task is seen as that of wife and mother, she still has strong possibilities of practising a profession or involving herself in other activities (i.e. charity ...), which has as a result, that her universe is not limited to her home. As well, she has the financial capacity to indulge in the consumption pushed by advertising; in fact, she spends a great deal of time at it.

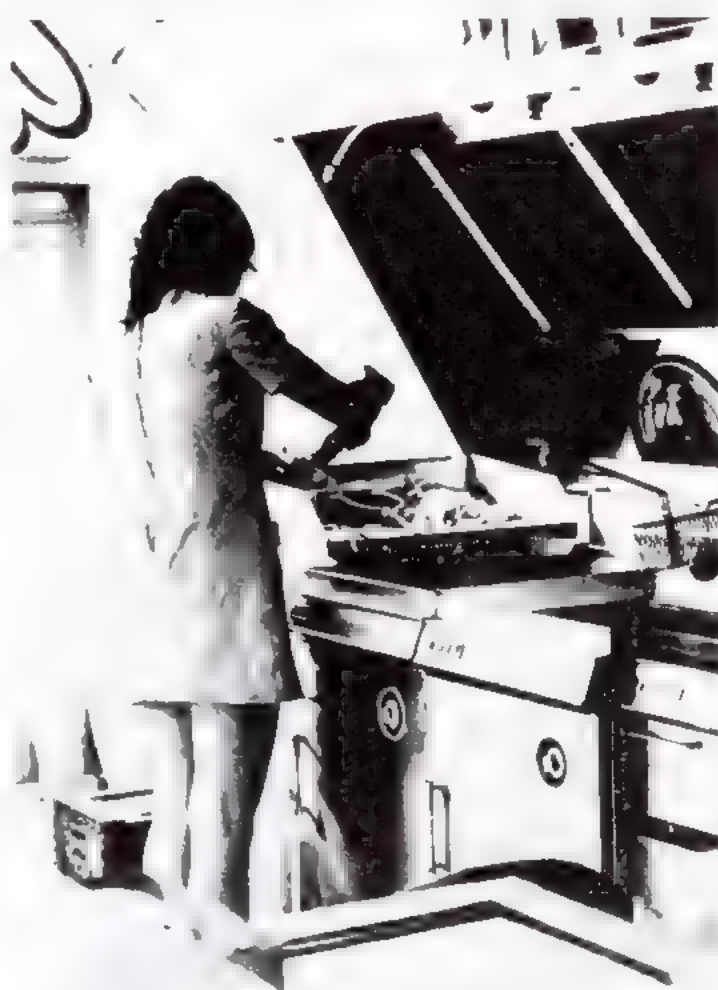
For a working woman, the situation is different. Her only future is as a mother, or, if she finds a job, it is likely to remind her of her work in the home (waitress, maid ...). And all the publicity that is pushed at her as much as at the bourgeois woman becomes nothing more for her than an object of frustration, unless she spends all her salary or even more on gratifying this frustration...

## FEMINISM AND THE CONCEPT OF PATRIARCHY

Feminism considers all women victims of male oppression in a society based on the superiority of men: "the exploiters are bosses and men." Feminism holds that the oppression of women is the primary form of oppression historically and in the present structure of society.

### 1) Theoretical Arguments

Some feminists agree that the male-female division originates in the biological reproductive system but leads to a social division of roles and is reflected on the unconscious and ideological levels. Others try to analyse the specific exploitation of women in housework; they define the family as the area of economic exploitation of women but they reduce the relations of exploitation to women's role in family



production and the husband-wife relation within the larger society. In this way they arrive at the conclusion that there exists a mode of production relatively independent of the functioning of capitalist society: the "patriarchal system." Feminism attacks the family at the level of its internal func

level of its internal functioning; it considers housework a mode of production without taking account of the economic aspect (paid or unpaid work) and attributes the cause to the individual husband-wife relationship.

### 2) The Practical Results

In practise, this analysis leads to independent and isolated struggle. It maintains that the liberation of women will not occur without the destruction of the patriarchal mode of production. Mobilization must then be based on patriarchal oppression and include all oppressed individuals...

### 3) Critique of Feminism

This perspective does not present a concrete analysis of the development of the family structure in its relation to the development of the productive forces and the various modes of production that have historically succeeded "primitive communism." It does not show that the family has not always existed in its present form and that it plays an important role in the functioning of society. Also this perspective masks the differences between families and the role of the family in the reproduction of the working and capitalist classes: when one is born working class, one most likely will stay



working class.

Feminism, defining the problem in this way, tends to accentuate the male-female divisions while hiding the conflicting interests of workers (male and female) and bosses (male and female). It neglects then the fact that the division of labour and the exploitation of women keeps housework in the form of "private production" which assures in part the reproduction of classes (to begin with, each family unit does not have the same resources). This role is essential for the accumulation of wealth, of profit. The fact that all men profit, to very different degrees, from this situation created by the possessing few, is not the cause of the condition of women, but its effect. The condition of women contributes to the values engendered by class rule, and to say that all men indiscriminately are responsible for the situation of women,

is to pretend that the majority of them (workers) control the means of production, determine the relations of production, and thus the social relations coming from them.

By hiding the close connection between the struggle of women and the struggle of workers, by not giving an explanation of the real basis of the exploitation of women, working class women are put in a false position because their liberation is seen as conflicting with their class interests.

### ORGANIZATION OF WOMEN

The problem of working class women can't be posed outside of the actual political, economic, and social situation; it is grounded in the same contradictions between the working class and the capitalist class.

This problem has however, salient aspects originating from the social division of labour that has relegated women to a single realm; that of reproduction and maintenance of the labour force.

The working class woman every day is beset with contradictions that can only be resolved by profound changes in the real relations of production and the social relations springing from them, changes that can only be realized by the taking of power by workers and collective ownership of the means of production.

The development of social relations in capitalist society has relegated women to certain tasks which bourgeois ideology attempts to exemplify as "biological," "natural." It's no exaggeration to say that bourgeois ideology — is transported and repeated by that class. On the other hand, the experience of various revolutions has shown that if the female situation springs from the division of labour, with the division of society into classes, it does not automatically disappear with the establishment of socialism. It is essential to reverse the relations of production "wage labour/capital" but that does not necessarily simultaneously destroy the old ideology. Women must enter production outside the home, thereby assuring themselves liberation, that is to say, that the particular form of their oppression necessitates that women carry on their own struggles based, however, on the struggles of the working class against



the capitalists; struggles that will only be victorious when bourgeois ideology as well as capitalist relations of production have disappeared.

This suggests therefore the necessity of a regroupement of women within a political workers organization. Such a group would not be feminist. This does not at all mean that the organization would disassociate women from the struggles of the men. It would mean an organization that would permit women to participate actively and consciously in these struggles while carrying on particular struggles necessitated by the forms of exploitation particular to women in capitalist society.

The necessity of a group of women in the working class corresponds to particular characteristics of the exploitation of which they are

victims. Along with problems of their own, come those that men -- father, husband, friend -- often happen to accentuate, victims that they also are of the dominant ideology, the women having no other class choice but to organize themselves for a better understanding of their problems, for carrying on the struggles necessary to the solution, and finally for **MAKING THE WOMAN PROBLEM A DEMAND OF THE WHOLE WORKING CLASS.**

The problems women must face rest on the same fundamental contradictions as the problems of the whole working class, the struggles of women constitute a very important element in the development of the working class struggle for the abolition, not only of exploitative economic relations, but also of all social relations that favour the reproduction of capitalist exploitation.

## Charts - Working women in Québec

### PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF INDUSTRY and AVERAGE SALARIES

| SECTORS                       | % of Women | Average Salary |
|-------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Wood                          | 5.4        | \$2,672        |
| Clothing                      | 71.1       | 2,972          |
| Leather                       | 46.1       | 3,027          |
| Hosiery                       | 61.6       | 3,059          |
| Furniture                     | 10.5       | 3,520          |
| Textiles                      | 30.0       | 3,706          |
| Food                          | 20.4       | 3,901          |
| Rubber                        | 29.1       | 3,912          |
| Diverse Manufacturing         | 29.6       | 3,937          |
| Tobacco                       | 50.9       | 4,577          |
| Non-metallic Mineral Products | 9.8        | 4,620          |
| Machinery                     | 10.3       | 4,676          |
| Printing and Publishing       | 27.6       | 5,558          |
| Metal Products                | 9.5        | 4,795          |
| Electrical products           | 24.4       | 5,081          |
| Paper and Connected Products  | 12.8       | 5,335          |
| Chemical Products             | 23.6       | 5,350          |
| Sports Equipment              | 7.4        | 5,386          |
| Primary metals                | 6.2        | 5,558          |
| Oil and Gas Products          | 7.8        | 7,224          |

The following tables and excerpt were taken from a dossier put out by Québécoises Deboutte.

### Rate of Labour Force

#### Participating

| Year | Men  | Women |
|------|------|-------|
| 1946 | 85.6 | 22.2  |
| 1949 | 85.5 | 23.2  |
| 1952 | 84.8 | 24.2  |
| 1955 | 83.9 | 23.8  |
| 1958 | 82.1 | 25.7  |
| 1961 | 81.1 | 26.6  |
| 1962 | 79.2 | 26.8  |
| 1963 | 78.4 | 27.8  |
| 1964 | 78.0 | 28.0  |
| 1965 | 77.8 | 29.3  |
| 1966 | 77.8 | 31.5  |
| 1967 | 77.8 | 32.5  |
| 1968 | 76.0 | 32.3  |

## Equal pay for Equal work?

### Clothing industry, 1967

|                |        |                  |        |
|----------------|--------|------------------|--------|
| male finisher  | \$1.95 | female finisher  | \$1.44 |
| male assembler | \$1.46 | female assembler | \$1.44 |
| male liner     | \$1.82 | female liner     | \$1.44 |
| male tailor    | \$2.05 | female tailor    | \$1.59 |

### Womens' Clothing industry

|                                         |   |        |
|-----------------------------------------|---|--------|
| male industrial sewing machine operator | - | \$2.36 |
| female domestic sewing machine operator | - | \$1.37 |

### Hosiery industry

|      |        |        |        |
|------|--------|--------|--------|
| male | \$1.69 | female | \$1.36 |
|------|--------|--------|--------|

### Percentage of

the labour force

working less than

35 hours per week

| Year | Men | Women |
|------|-----|-------|
| 1960 | 3.1 | 16.7  |
| 1965 | 4.3 | 22.1  |
| 1970 | 6.3 | 24.9  |

## CONCENTRATION OF WOMEN WORKERS

... 4 groups of occupations include 80% of the female labour force: "professionals and technicians" - 16.5%, "office workers" - 25.6%, "service and recreational workers" - 21.1%, "artisans and manual workers" - 18.1%.

This characteristic of concentration is even more evident if we consider the professions chosen by women within each of these occupational groups.

Even though the category "administrators" includes 35 occupations, two of them include 62% of all women working in this category: "owners and managers of a retail store" - 53%, "owners and managers of a personal service" - 19%. Only 33% of male "administrators" are in these two occupations.

In the category "professionals and technicians" which includes 35 occupations, 71% of women workers are either teachers - 48.5%, or nurses and student nurses - 23%.

Among the 13 types of "sales clerks", 91% of women are ordinary "sales-ladies".

More than 96% of women in "services and recreation" are found in 4 categories: "hostesses, waitresses, cooks and chambermaids" - 77.6%, "hairdressers and manicurists" - 6.4%, "laundry workers" - 5%, "janitors and cleaners" - 7.6%.

In transport and communications, 92% of women workers are telephone operators.

Even though female "skilled workers and artisans" are dispersed among 93 of the 232 occupations in this category, 5 occupations include almost 68% of women workers:

- cutter, assembler, sewer, 6%
- spinning, weaving, and knitting machine operators, 9%
- dressmaker (outside of manufacturing), 6.9%
- sewing machine operator, 36.3%
- bottlers, packers, labellers, 9.6%



# Part 2:

## Women in the Workplace



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# Women Struggle to Unionize

Following are two reprints from two documents on struggles undertaken at Coleco and Lumiray, two plants located in St. Henri, a working class area of Montreal. The first was written by Québécoises Deboutte (June 1973) after lengthy meetings with a woman worker active at Coleco. The second was produced by women from the Lumiray plant and was also published in Québécoises Deboutte (July 1973).

Coleco employs 500 to 800 workers and manufactures toys; Lumiray employs 90 to 140 workers who make lighting fixtures. The two plants have many similarities. Both are labour-intensive, low-paying factories, mostly requiring unskilled workers to assemble their products. Due to the sexist structure of the labour market this is a sector disproportionately reserved for women. In each plant women make up 70% of the work force.

Prior to the two struggles documented here, the level of organization and political consciousness of the workers at both places was rather low. At Coleco the struggle began in opposition to a "company union"; while at Lumiray, the workers, having seen the "success" achieved at Coleco, began a fight for unionization.

Both these reprints discuss women's oppression as workers and not their general oppression as women which also extends beyond the workplace. Still, the special problem of women in union structures is vividly demonstrated in the two struggles. While women provided the militant bases for actions in both plants, once victories were won they were relegated to secondary positions for reasons related to bureaucracy and lack of confidence in women -- i.e. male chauvinism -- practiced by the unions. However, key issues have been raised in both struggles that were previously submerged and an organizational basis for further work established. Coleco and Lumiray represent important first steps in attacking the superexploitation of women at the workplace.

## COLECO

### NATURE OF THE WORK FORCE

The number of people working at Coleco varies from 500, in "slack" periods, to 800, 70% of whom are women. Immigrants (mostly male) make up 20%.

The workers' average age is about 23. Around 50% of the employees are under 18 years of age. As the workers are very young, the majority of the women are unmarried, or perhaps more precisely "not yet married" since in general many work only in order to get themselves a husband. But as a general rule men and women are not allowed to work in the same shop. One part of the women's salary goes to help out their parents. The rest goes above all for fashionable clothes, cosmetics, etc. Moreover the women are often on finance because they commonly have many debts. And the majority don't know if they'll see the day when they will be able to escape all this. That is why a large number buy lottery tickets, hoping that "their" ticket will come in and quickly resolve their problems.

The level of schooling of the workers rarely goes beyond 10th or 11th grade among the young people, and among the older group it is only



around 3rd or 4th grade on the average. Many do not even know how to write.

Starting wage for all employees is the minimum wage (\$1.69). After 3 months of work, when one has become a "regular", it is raised to \$1. an hour.

Coleco has a company union affiliated to the Canadian Federation of Independent Associations (FCAI). But the workers wanted to get rid of the FCAI. THEY DECIDED TO WORK FOR A UNION THAT WILL SERVE THEIR OWN INTERESTS.

#### THE WOMEN GET TOGETHER

After having created some friendships within Coleco, two militant women workers called a group of women to a meeting to talk about the need to organize at Coleco. But from the beginning, the instabilities that confronted the group were apparent.

Constituted exclusively of women, one can easily perceive the difficulties associated with the work of organizing such a group: difficulties that arise out of the traditional role of the woman in society -- her role of wife-mother-housewife. There were children to take care of, housework to do without any help, etc.

Moreover, one can see how strong the oppression of women can be within the family structure: some husbands not allowing their wives to have evening activities, refusing to help out around the house, or opposing any union activities by their wives.

There were some that left, but the group was maintained by new members (men and women) and by the tenacity of the "originals".

#### THE FCAI IS ELIMINATED

Coleco was already "unionized" but that didn't say much, since the FCAI was not known as a union that defended the interests of the workers but rather those of the bosses. The organizing therefore started from a critique of the FCAI made by workers of Coleco dissatisfied with "their union".

One worker from Clix (a zip-fastener plant that had just unionized) suggested to the group to affiliate with the Metallos (FTQ) because they were most experienced in eliminating the FCAI from large shops.

The signing of cards was started using all kinds of methods: through conversations, washroom drawings to raise morale, etc. The stage of signature-gathering lasted 2 months in all: It began in September 1971 and the request for union accreditation was submitted on November 11. Given the number of employees at Coleco this was very rapid.

As there are three shifts at Coleco the Metallos provided one fellow who was in charge of organizing so that there would be a continuity of work among all the shifts.

#### ANTI-UNION REPRESSION

The period of signature-gathering was short but it was not without incident. The FCAI quickly became aware that its interests at Coleco were being jeopardized, and from the beginning they were paying one fellow to spy and inform as to whether a new union was being formed. This guy who was said to be in the company's pay, asked one of the militant workers if she also wished to work as a spy on workers stealing in the shop.



At a meeting he was confronted and asked to leave because no one trusted him. He then signed a union card to show his good faith but thereafter was not seen again.

After this the FCAI sent a letter to everyone alleging that the card's signed for the Metallos were no longer valid after a certain elapsed time. As well it made reference to two radio broadcasts (on syndicalism) that had involved a militant from the shop: "It won't be him who gives you your jobs." But the workers were not duped by these tricks.

Failing in its approaches to the workers as a whole, the FCAI resorted to individual threats, especially against one woman in particular. This woman had been active in organizing from the beginning. The FCAI hoped that through attacking one of the leaders it could break the spirit of the group. First came threatening telephone calls late at night (she lived alone). On another occasion she narrowly avoided being run over by a car when she ran on hearing the squeal of tires. She believed that this was just a drunken driver, but 15 minutes later another telephone call informed her that: "You escaped tonight, but next time you won't be so lucky." This woman was only 17 years old at the time....

The bosses acknowledged the key role played by this particular militant and repeatedly tried to isolate her, through transfer to different departments, intimidating other workers who spoke to her, etc....

Between the submission of the application for the union accreditation and the accreditation itself there were five arbitration proceedings for workers who were laid off, four for union activities and the fifth (a woman) because she was absent for two weeks for reasons of health. ("We have no need of a bag of bones like you," said the boss.) This woman was so intimidated that she never even appeared at the proceedings.

#### THE EXECUTIVE IS FORMED

During the period of card-signing the workers had named a provisional executive. (The president was the woman who had taken such a central role.) As soon as the union was legally accredited a committee was formed to negotiate a new collective agreement. Of the five people on this committee there were two women, one of whom was the young militant spoken of already. Once the contract was signed, a "plot" (initiated by male militants of the group) was organised against her, so that she would





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not be re-elected to the official union executive.

They pointed to the fact that she was a woman. According to them: the workers -- both male and female -- would have less confidence in a woman representative. It was by this argument that they succeeded in convincing her to run only for treasurer and not president. But they would later understand that the workers would only identify with an executive that they had confidence in, because of the concrete work it undertook in the plant. Such an executive is one of the things that can motivate the workers to involve themselves in future struggles. Moreover the militants who were at the centre of the plot all recognize now that this militant had the necessary confidence of the workers to be elected president.

On the other hand, Coleco, given the level of women's participation in organizational work, is a typical example of the majority of cases, where workers, male and female, try to organize.

During the whole period preceding official accreditation, the women workers were present and active and were even dominant at the beginning of organizational work. But as soon as there was an election for a union executive, they were left out (as at Lumiray). That is why there were only three women among the eleven people on the executive. Moreover they only held the less important positions, apart from the young militant who was elected secretary. In addition, the three women now hardly participate in executive meetings, mainly because of family problems.

## MANIPULATION

Contract negotiations began in January, 1972 and were characterized by a marked lack of information circulating amongst the workers because of the boss's obstruction and the negligence of the union organizer. From the beginning, the organizer had consistently manipulated the workers. On the other hand, it is important to remember that, during the whole period of negotiation there were three militants who were laid off and one other who had been muzzled by isolating her on a different floor of the plant. The bosses knew that, with these obstacles, union information would circulate much more slowly in the shop. They were in an advantageous position, and they profited from the workers' general lack of experience.

As well, the union organizer decided that the best tactic was collaboration with the boss and he refused to count on the strength of the workers. The advice he constantly repeated, shows this clearly: "Don't intervene too much. We must not harm relations with the boss!". Moreover, he would not keep the workers informed. His practice was to keep them isolated from the negotiations, even if it would be they who would have to accept a contract that would scarcely meet their needs, let alone their demands.

During the entire period of contract preparation, the organizer constantly manipulated the negotiating committee (who represented the workers and their demands). On the question of higher salaries his line was: "We do not make the same demands in the toy industry as we do in the beer industry." By this he meant that, because the demand for beer would remain constant on the market, higher wages could be commanded than would be the case with toys -- the bosses, of course, would have to make their profits all the same.

The organizer's control was so great that the boss would phone him directly to settle grievances rather than passing through the negotiating

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committee as is the correct procedure. When the contract was ready for ratification, a general meeting of the workers was called. A curious thing - at this assembly only the organizer had a copy of the agreement - he read it for five hours ( on a Saturday no less ). He subtly managed to discourage any attempts at general criticisms. Moreover, the organizer continually cut off the militants at the general meeting and, consequently, discouraged all initiative on the part of the workers.

As in all union activities, there is a very clear organizational division of labour. There is a union bureaucrat for recruiting, for organizing, and for negotiating. Certain militants have even stated that union activity is so controlled by "organizers" ( in general ) that workers from shop to shop talk among themselves: "I hope you don't have X as a negotiator, he's worse than Y."

This allegation isn't exclusive to the Metallos ( FTQ ) since the other union centrals seem to proceed in the same way. What should happen is that one single organizer should follow through the struggle in a particular shop. His role should, above all, centre on the distribution of information. It is the task of the workers themselves to organize their struggle so that they can control the union that they create.

#### CHANGES SINCE UNIONIZATION

The time required to be recognized as a regular employee ( i.e. the time required to be protected by the union ) has been reduced to three months. With regard to maternity leave, the husband gets one day off with pay to be with his wife. But, as in most cases, the women workers themselves at Coleco are not paid on the day of the birth of their child. They do get the maternity leave that is provided for in the unemployment insurance act.

Equal pay for equal work has been obtained, but it must be pointed out that it is still the women who have the most difficult jobs. The bosses know that they are the most exploited cheap labour ( like immigrants ): whatever the salary, they must stay out of necessity. And there is always a reserve of women workers sufficient to assure a good turn-over. One of the foremen did not restrain himself from showing the contempt he has: "Women, they're a dime a dozen."

#### AN INSTRUMENT : THE PAPER

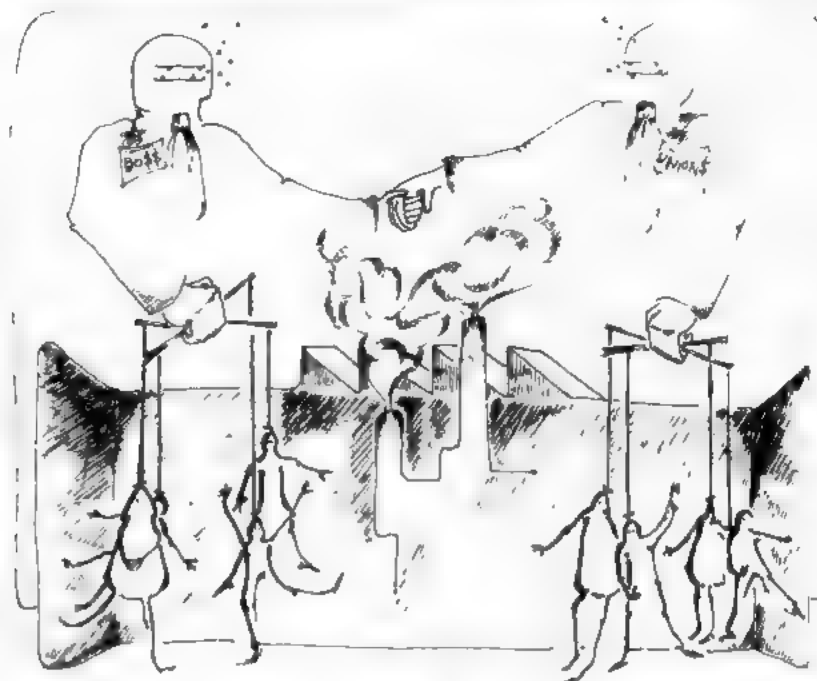
Now that the union is installed a group of five militants ( a little different from the executive because of dissension ) meets together. It is composed of three women and two men.

This group of militants is concerned above all with putting out a paper to bring together once again the workers at Coleco. They have concluded that this is the best instrument because it is read and appreciated by the workers. The content of the paper is above all concerned with struggles at Coleco and also, in a more general way, with the struggles in the community of St. Henri. The militants who put out the paper realize that it is important at present to show the workers that the struggles within Coleco are political as well. However, they have decided that it is still too early to mention struggles led at the national and international levels. One of the objectives of the paper is that the workers develop a greater consciousness of the struggle waged within the plant and take control of



their union. It is very important that the workers go beyond trade union struggle.

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## LUMIRAY

### HOW THE UNION BEGAN

A woman who had worked at Celasco got in touch with the Métallistes in order to bring the union into Lumiray. However, the woman withdrew immediately from the organization because she lacked self-confidence and three or four men took the leadership in the unionization effort. Within three weeks and without the boss's knowledge, the necessary number of union cards was signed and an application for union accreditation was presented. The women had played only a secondary role in this process.

At this time, a union organizer from the Métallistes put fifteen workers in contact with three militants. Of the fifteen workers, ten were women (only one was married). This group decided to meet regularly and to carry out an investigation of conditions in the factory in order to prepare for the contract negotiations....

...The whole group actively participated in the study. The study revealed numerous inequalities between the men and the women especially in salaries, pay raises and jobs assigned. With few exceptions the men considered these inequalities as normal. Because of the men's attitudes and the fact that they basically controlled the group, the women's participation decreased as the study went on to investigate the workers' consciousness and perception of their milieu. As a result, the union does not know and cannot deal with the specific problems of the women workers.

### MEETING AND ORGANIZATION

As soon as the demand for accreditation was made, repression began particularly amongst the women workers (strict watch over comings and goings - even to the toilet - suspensions for talking, increase in the work speed). It is obvious that the bosses were playing upon the fact that the women were more

afraid and generally less aggressive.

To oppose this repression and the lack of information being supplied by the Métallos some of the women decided to form an information organization inside the factory. This organization is composed of several groups or "cells". It more or less worked but because the organization was made up of friends it had difficulty in reaching all the workers. Also the role of the "cells" was not clearly defined and they lacked well-developed propaganda methods. With better methods ( tracts newspapers etc. ) reaching more of the workers the participation and consciousness of the workers would undoubtedly have been higher.

The information organization decided to prepare a contract proposal using the results from the study for the upcoming negotiations. Fired for union activities the president of the union played a dominant role in the preparation of the contract proposal. The "cells" were used to spread information about the contract and its clauses but it was done in a very heavy style which turned off a lot of the workers.

With accreditation events unrolled quickly. At a general meeting a negotiating committee was formed. It was composed of four men and one woman. The woman was a concession by the men who felt that women are incapable of negotiation but that one should be included so that the committee would be representative.

The negotiations began the next week without giving the committee time to prepare. As a result the union representative gained control of the bargaining. With this development information ceased to reach the rank and file. The union rep went so far as to swear the negotiating committee to silence so as not to prejudice the on-going bargaining. In spite of feeling insecure because they didn't know what was happening, the militancy of the workers was growing but they received no support from, and were even opposed by the union representative.

## THE MEANS OF ACTION

### a) The Newspaper

In spite of everything, a newspaper did finally appear and became the only way of supplying information despite the instability of the group. It played an important role in continuing worker militancy and in denouncing certain practices during negotiations.

### b) General Assemblies

The women had put their trust in the union and they realized that the union was just playing games with them. Faced with an almost total lack of information the women decided to circulate a petition calling for a general meeting.

The women played an extremely important role in the general assemblies. It was they who strongly advocated the most progressive demands - wage equality - elimination of the role of "lead-hand" - a forty hour work week - and abolition of overtime. The last two demands are directly related to the fact that women have two full-time jobs - one in the factory and one at home. As well they asked for paid maternity leave but they didn't insist on this clause apparently because they took it for granted that a woman is not paid while having her children.



The result was that maternity leave was included in the contract but the right to cumulative seniority was given only to women who had worked more than a year. This means that a woman who takes maternity leave after eleven months of work loses all her seniority and must start again at zero when she returns. Thus the woman is penalized for her pregnancy. This problem arose in the case of a worker who had been at Lumiray for seven months when she had to leave, thus losing all her seniority.

#### c) The Work Stoppage

On the morning before the vote on the contract offer (the union rep advocated a yes vote because if they rejected the offer they would be forced to go on strike) the women realized that they came out second best in wages. So they organized a work stoppage in demand for higher wages. This was successful in two ways: it brought the workers together and it forced the union to reopen negotiations.

### CHANGES SINCE UNIONIZATION

More and more the women realized that they were capable of assuming union posts. Even if these positions are secondary, it is at least a step in the right direction. As well the women developed much more critical attitudes towards and became much less dependent on the lead-hands and the more aggressive male workers who, until this point, had led the struggles. The grievances filed with the union since the contract have been filed mainly by the women who have been much more militant in demanding their rights.

On the other hand, the women must continue to prove their combativity even more than the men - if they want to be taken seriously. In effect, even if less so than before, the men, especially those in the union, still have their condescending and paternalistic attitudes to the women. They continue to regard the women as objects (if a woman wears a dress, the men whistle and ask what she is doing on the week-end). ...



# Crystal Hosiery:

## An Example of Superexploitation

The conditions described in this article probably typify those faced by the approximately 100,00 workers employed in Montreal's clothing and textile industry. The bosses' profits are based on the double exploitation of immigrant women, who generally working on the piece work system often earn less than the \$1.85 minimum wage. The owner of Crystal closed down the shop rather than operate with the union the women had succeeded in bringing in. But although they now have to find new jobs, the women say they had no choice--they couldn't continue as things were. And they'll keep on fighting.

Crystal Hosiery is a factory which produces panty-hose. Normally, this company employs 140 people of which 120 are women, mainly of Greek origin.

The work is done on an assembly line and paid as piece work. This means that the pressure is very great. Not only must the workers follow the rhythm of the machine but they also have to produce the maximum to get a decent wage at the end of the week. The result is nerve pills and nervous breakdowns.

The women work 42½ hours a week as well as Saturdays with no overtime rate. There is no time off to eat. The workers are forced to eat their sandwiches at their machine and only when the production leaves time. As well there are no breaks, no paid holidays -- not even Christmas and New Year's Day -- no maternity leave, no job security, no raises -- nothing but the minimum wage or worse.

### THE CHRONIC ANTI-UNIONISM OF THE BOSSES

Not satisfied with his profits (about \$500,000.00 a year), Mr. Hals, the boss, began to use a very effective strategy which enabled him to increase production while paying his employees less.

"Four or five years ago we had a better wage than we have today. We were paid 15 cents per dozen panty-hose and, if we worked hard, we could make a wage of \$90 to \$100 weekly. The boss decided to lower the rate per dozen from 15 cents to 10 cents. Five cents seems like nothing but for us it meant a dollar less per hour. So we went to see Mr. Hals and we told him that we could not work under such conditions. We demanded that he raise our wages a little. He agreed to pay 12 cents per dozen which still meant a 60 cents loss per hour. We were forced to work twice as hard to get the same wage. But we couldn't refuse because we weren't organized and we were afraid of being fired. Once Mr. Hals saw that his tactic worked he began to use it regularly. Every six months he would go through a department and lower the rates one or two cents. Finally two years ago we got so fed up that we decided to organize in order to defend ourselves."

Through the Greek Workers' Club, the women of Crystal Hosiery contacted the CSN to bring in the union. At the first meeting a majority of votes was obtained. Friday April 11, 1972, 80 women signed their membership card and, a few days later, 120 workers had signed up.





Monday April 14, the boss, realizing that his factory wanted to unionize, talked to all the employees individually and asked them to sign a declaration stating that they did not want a union for another year. The same evening, he fired 36 women for union activities. The union brought the case before the labour court which ordered the rehiring of the 36 with full salary for the time they had not worked.



"He still hasn't paid us. In total the back wages represent a sum of about \$18,000 to \$20,000."

March 26, 1973, the union received its accreditation and the "negotiations" began. The company lawyer found a thousand excuses not to negotiate and finally gave the following offer -- a lowering of salary for the next eighteen months and after that a return to existing conditions.

Seeing the bad faith of the company the union demanded arbitration. Four days later, Hals sent a notice of closing of the factory for the 28th of February, 1974 to the union and the government.

"We weren't asking a great deal: better working conditions, job security, overtime pay, paid holidays, and a raise we have never seen before. Prices are going up and wages stay the same or go down.

"The boss did everything to destroy the union. A year ago he raised the wages for the men to stop them from supporting us. As well they have the most important jobs on the machines and, without them, the company could not continue. But the men supported us to the very end. Hals also offered us a raise in wages if we would give up the union. Now he is shutting down the factory to stop the union from getting in."

## THE SITUATION IN THE HOSIERY INDUSTRY

The reason for all this is simple. In the hosiery industry in Montréal there are ten big companies employing one hundred to four hundred workers each and twenty-five other, smaller companies. None of these is unionized and all employ mainly women. Working conditions and salaries are the same. As well the bosses know each other very well. If a union got into one of the shops, the example would be given and it

wouldn't take long for the union to get into the rest of the shops and force the bosses to treat the women workers more "decently".

The women from Crystal distributed pamphlets at two other factories: Bella Hosiery and Avalon Hosiery. At Bella, the workers were very interested and the next day thirty women were at the Greek club to discuss the possibility of organising themselves. Ten days later three employees were fired. At Avalon it was the same thing: one worker was fired and the work week was reduced from six to five days without lowering of wages. This favor was given to stop unionization.

The women from Crystal went to apply for jobs at the other companies. All of them, without exception, were refused -- a blacklist of employees from Crystal had been given by Hals to all the other bosses. He even refused to sign a paper which would have allowed the formation of a reclassification committee for the workers in the other shops.

February 28th the men and women of Crystal Hosiery found themselves on the pavement. They are now forced to find another job and begin again at zero -- probably in the same industry and under the same conditions.

"We don't regret what we have done. It was impossible to continue in those conditions. We will find other jobs in clothing and we will try to organize again, as long as the labour code remains the same and as long as the employers continue to mock women who work."

**IF MEN ARE BORN TO WORK FOR THEIR BREAD, THE WOMEN ARE BORN FOR THE CRUMBS.**

As well as the super-exploitation that they live through in the shop, the women of Crystal Hosiery aren't finished work when they leave the factory after eight to ten hours work. They have to take care of the children and their husband, make the meals, wash, iron... "after work I do my housework. Tomorrow for example, I will wash and the next day I will iron... I try to keep my weekends for resting."

"For me (another woman) its not the same. When I get home I am too tired. I finish at nine o'clock in the evening. I cook, do the dishes, make the beds, and then I sleep. The rest I have to do on the weekends."

"My husband doesn't help me at all, ever! He doesn't even take care of the kids! I don't find this right and I wish that he would help me. Now I am teaching my son to help."

"In reality, we work from six in the morning until ten at night, as well as the weekends."





# Women's Struggle in a Paper Box Factory

The plant described here is comparatively well-paying for the male employees, while the women fill the lowest-wage positions with little opportunity for advancement. The women organized themselves in their own department to fight against an increase in their workload; their action was supported by the majority of the men. With this support, the women were able to force the plant management to give in to their demands.

The factory is one of medium size which produces cardboard containers. It is one of a number of enterprises of the same type, belonging to a large pulp and paper monopoly, which in turn is 70% controlled by an English food product monopoly.

The companies producing cardboard are closely tied to the industrial sector of the pulp and paper industry. They constitute an important as well as a stable outlet. From the early sixties, the pulp and paper industry developed rapidly until 1969-70. Large increases in demand on the world market permitted the companies to substantially increase their profits, while at the same time concentrating the industrial sectors (pulp and paper, cardboard and containers, etc.). But in the beginning of the 1970's, there was a halt in this temporary expansion. The market became suddenly overloaded, and as a result, production was slowed down in several factories. (Thousands were laid off permanently or temporarily from 1970-72.) Finally, there has been a certain recuperation in the industry since 1972. In the factory we are discussing, this is seen concretely by a general economic improvement: increase in production, expansion projects, the resumption of hiring on a more regular basis. . . . In general, you could say that the industry as a whole, and our factory, were in a good economic situation.

## PRODUCTION IN THE FACTORY

There are about 300 workers in the factory, who produce cardboard containers for the tobacco, food and cosmetic industries. The workers are divided into two basic sectors of production:

a) the lithography department, where the containers are printed: there are 75 workers here who are the most qualified and best paid in the plant.

b) the rest of the factory is divided into several sections, where the workers cut, assemble, sort and pack the containers. There are about 230 workers, either on machines requiring three to six workers each, or on general jobs (shipping, packing, maintenance, etc.). It is here that we find the women in the factory (about 70) who have the lowest-paid and least interesting jobs.

Production is tightly organized: the rate of work is closely watched, and the foremen are strict. The workers are presently working in dangerous conditions because of the increase in production and stock on hand; the factory is overcrowded and thus the workers have no place to manoeuvre.

The management of the company is composed totally of English Montrealers, all positions above the level of foreman are filled by anglophones, and the head office is in Ontario

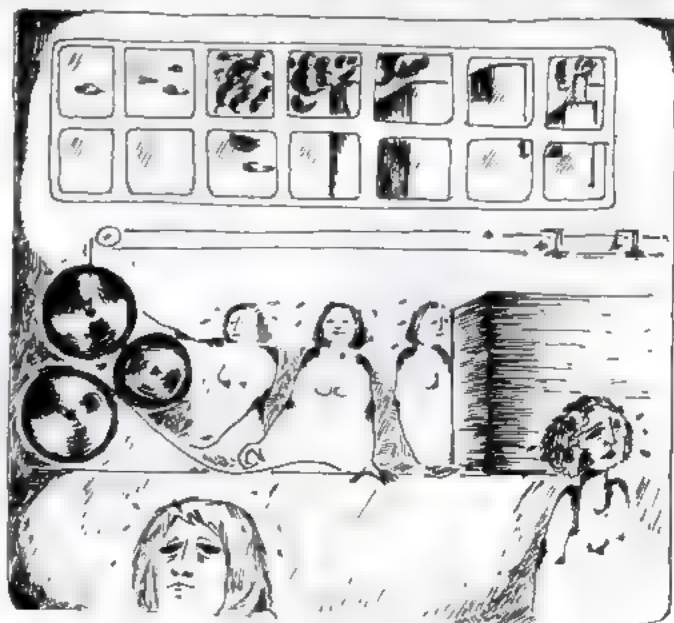
## II THE WORKERS (MEN AND WOMEN)

The workers in the factory are divided in several ways. The most important division is that of the one between the 75 printers unionized with the International Union of Lithographers and Engravers, and the rest of the workers who are members of the Wood and Forest Workers Union (CNTU).

The first group is the most privileged in the factory. They have been unionized for a long time and form a sort of a caste that is very protected and very distant from the rest of the workers. The pressmen, who are at the top of the hierarchy of this group, have very high salaries (up to \$7.40 an hour) and far better working conditions than most. They are surrounded by assistant pressmen and helpers, who do not have the same advantages as pressmen, but who are, all the same, isolated from the rest of the workers. Because of the agreement signed by their union, there is no seniority clause. Thus a system of patronage and favoritism is very strong among the workers. For instance, if an employee wants to advance from helper to assistant pressman, he must gain the favor of the pressman and the forman. There are cases of workers who have been assistant pressman for ten years because the pressman "didn't like their looks". In addition a large number of workers in this department are anglophones, a fact which increases their isolation from the others.

The great majority of the workers are in the assembly, cutting, sorting and packing departments. They joined the FTPF-CNTU in 1965. Previously, conditions in the plant were pretty bad: salaries varied from \$1.10 to \$2.20; there was no protection for the workers, and all "recalcitrant" workers very quickly found themselves pounding the sidewalks, without any recourse or appeal (for example, if he objected a bit too much about obligatory overtime). The entry of the CNTU gradually changed conditions a little. In order to increase their negotiating force, the workers joined the same union as workers in the 14 other cardboard and paper factories, altogether making a total of 1,400 workers. There has not been a strike since the union was brought in.

The workers syndicated with the CNTU are themselves divided, mainly between men and women. There are about 70 women in the factory; there is no classification for them, and there is a separate seniority list. They almost





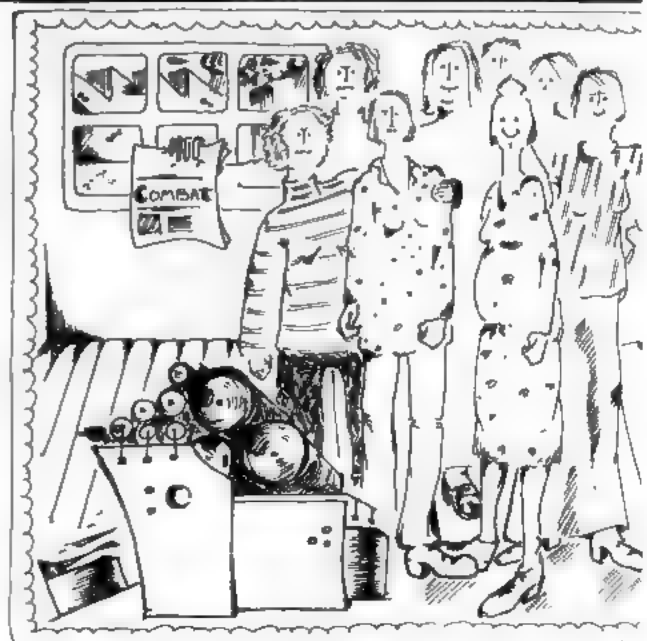
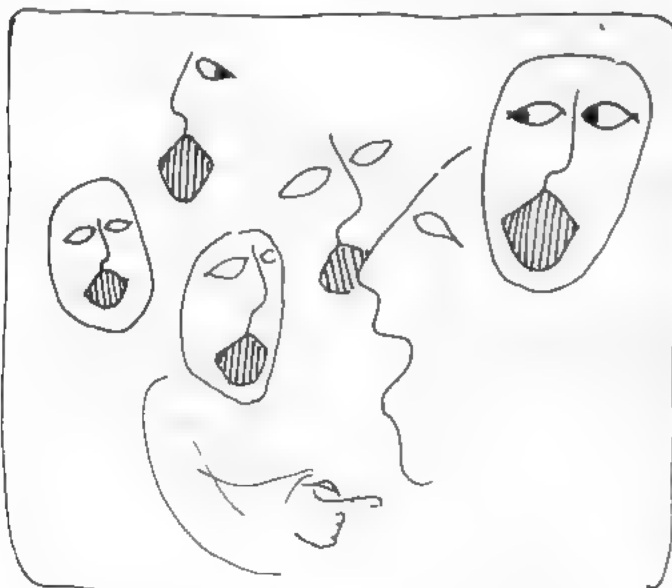
all have a fixed wage of \$2.32 an hour, with no hope of advancement. Most of the women are young (under 30 years of age), and they leave the factory as quickly as they arrive (25% turnover per year). In general, they work on the most routine and alienating jobs (e.g. checking the quality of cigarette packages). Up to now, their isolation from the other workers and from the union has been very strong. But the men are divided as well; about 80 workers have a classification, with a certain degree of qualification and seniority. The others, about 70, are unskilled workers. More than 70% are under 30 years old, and their salaries vary from \$2.97 for an unskilled worker to \$4.50 for an operator. Finally we should take note the presence of about 35 immigrant workers, mainly Italians, Greeks and Germans, who generally have a classification and work on the maintenance of the machines.

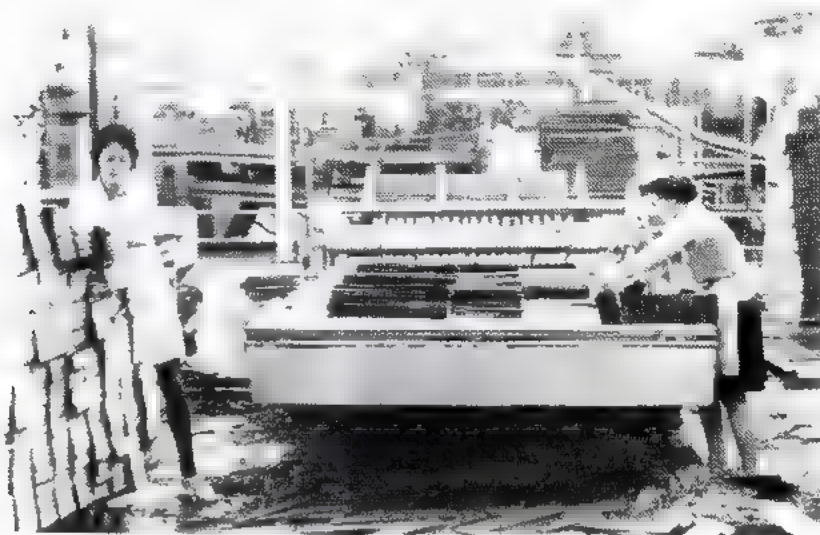
### THE CNTU UNION

During more than 8 years (1965 to May 1973), the union was controlled by a clique that came from the most skilled level of workers, in close collaboration with the professional negotiators of the CNTU. There had never been a struggle. The collective agreements were signed after secret arrangements with the bosses, often without even a minimum of consultation with workers. Participation at union meetings never went beyond 10% and their function was totally undemocratic.

The first break in the union was started by a group of young workers during contract negotiations in late 1972. Encouraged by some new and more progressive union officials, they started a mass mobilization by leading a one-day walkout to study the terms of the proposed contract. The union executive was forced to follow, an act which helped to give a certain amount of credibility to the young leaders.

The young leaders came out of this struggle in a stronger position. At the beginning of 1973, when they wanted to give themselves a more concrete and open form of organization, they decided on a factory paper.





"...the newspaper will be a pillar of syndicalism, but not dependent on it. It is therefore not directly tied to it..."

The group consolidated itself by defending the workers in a way that had never been seen in the factory. The workers, used to the old union routine, with the local controlled clique of untouchables, were amazed to see this phenomenon continue. The group, now transformed into a newspaper committee, continued its work. They denounced certain unpleasant working conditions (the heat in the shop), they fought against discrimination by certain foremen against certain workers; they also denounced the company for its lack of services for the workers--no parking, a badly equipped cafeteria, no vending machines, etc.). The paper also started a campaign to reinvigorate the union, explaining its structures and its functioning, inviting its members to participate in the democratisation of their union. They also tried to create more of a feeling of solidarity amongst the workers, and also with workers in other factories. They talked about the struggles of workers outside their own particular factory; bill c9, Canadian Gypsum, other cardboard factories, and so on.

### STRUGGLE AGAINST THE OLD UNION EXECUTIVE

Because of this initiative, the executive, still in the hands of the old clique, felt the need to take action. In April '72, during a union meeting, they tried to call a vote of blame against the members of the newspaper committee, saying that they were trouble-makers. Because of the strong opposition on the part of those present, the motion was withdrawn...and replaced by a vote of support for the paper. The conditions were thus created for a radical change in the union. In May 1972, in the union elections, the team presented by the newspaper committee won a resounding victory for all positions of the executive--with majorities ranging from 65% to 90%.

### A NEW UNION

Things changed quickly--and the difference was clearly seen. In six months they handled 25 grievances, compared to about 10 in the two years of



the old executive. From this time on, all attempts by the bosses at violating the contract received a quick retort from the union. The paper increased its work and undertook a syndical education campaign, discussing different points touching on general conditions in the factory. All this with a view toward preparing for the next collective agreement, coming up this summer.

This was seen in the more intense activity in the union: people began to talk to each other and to demand reports from their executive. Participation at assemblies increased. The workers developed more of a fighting spirit; for instance, they began to protest violations of the contract on questions of safety or obligatory overtime. Thus, the climate in the shop changed slowly. The foremen, who were "law and order", now must politely ask workers to do overtime, without any pressure. This is an important problem, because 25% of total production is done in overtime, and most of the workers thus have work weeks of 48 to 50 hours. The continual intimidation by the foremen is being cut down.

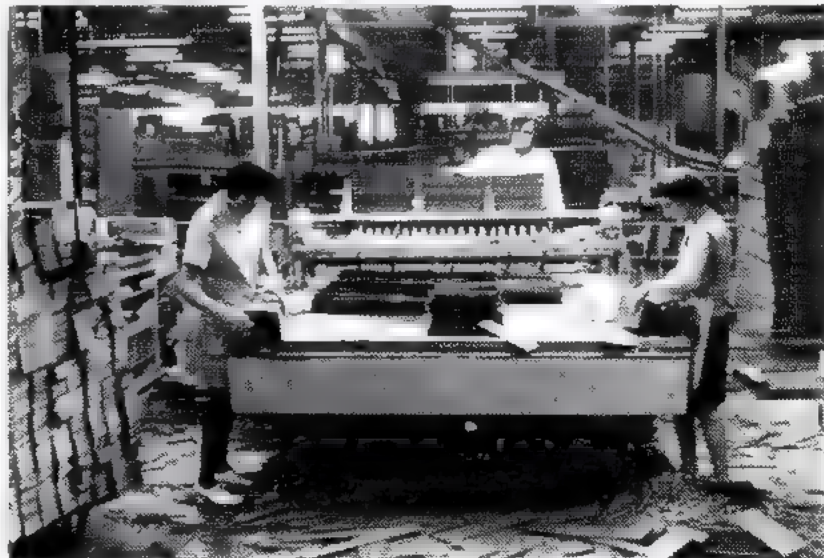
Up to now, the union hasn't had to face any heavy confrontation with the bosses, who were taken by surprise by this new militancy on the part of the workers—for example, the workers have won all but two of their grievances. The bosses tried to intimidate some of the union militants (suspension of one of the newspaper committee members for "lateness"), but their tactics haven't had much success.

## THE STRUGGLE

It is in this context of reorganizing the union and increasing worker combativity that a struggle developed. It happened at the beginning of September and mobilized the women at first, in a partial walkout, and then spread to become a wildcat of all the workers in the factory.

The women put up resistance to the deterioration of work conditions

At the beginning of September, the management decided to reorganize the production units where the women worked. Before, the women who fed and emptied the folding and cutting machines worked beside women who checked the quality of the products. In this way, the women on the machines



could be replaced for a few minutes, to go to smoke a cigarette or go to the bathroom. Management decided to have verification done in another department; the result was that the women on the machines saw their work load increased. Now, if they wanted to leave for a few minutes, they had to work like maniacs afterward to catch up. There was no longer anyone to replace them. The cartons piled up, and the operators and foremen blamed the women, who were now obliged to run to keep up.

On the 5th and 6th of September, there were consultations between the women affected and their union and the production and personnel managers. Nothing happened, and during the afternoon of September 7, the women walked out, in front of the managers, and occupied the cafeteria. The manager threatened to have them thrown out by force if they didn't leave--however, he did agree to negotiate. Because of his arrogant attitude (he refused to go to the cafeteria to talk to the women), the women decided not to work that day. The same day, a foreman fired two women who refused to work the 4-12 shift.



#### THE WOMEN PUT UP RESISTANCE TO THE DETERIORATION OF WORKING CONDITIONS

10 September: meeting between union reps and manager. The women had presented a petition demanding the immediate rehiring of the two women who had been fired. They obtained satisfaction in this matter. However, there is no agreement on the question of the speed-up. The women want to know why there is such a large difference in work load for men and women. They don't get any answer. But the manager promised to try to work things out with the machine operators. In any case, he promised the final answer the day after next. In the meantime, he said the women could just ask the operators to stop production when they couldn't keep up.

11 September: the women on the machines aren't able to agree with the operators and the foremen on the question of stopping production. The existing division between the operators, who are men, and the women, is carefully kept up by the bosses.

12 September: on the day he had specified, the manager doesn't show up with the "final answer". The women decide to occupy the washrooms while they wait for the manager. They know they can't continue at the present pace; they've always got the foremen on their backs when they want to stop production for a few minutes' rest. They get a partial agreement with the per-

sonnel manager who promises to moderate the "zeal" of the foremen. The women decide to return to work after a one-hour work stoppage.

14 September: by the morning break, the women still haven't got their final answer. They decide to go as a group to see the personnel manager. After a useless wait, they come back through the factory. They parade through all the departments, inviting the other workers to stop work and wait with them for the answer from the bosses. All meet in the cafeteria. The personnel manager orders the union executive to come to his office and gives them an ultimatum: go back to work or get out. In addition, he hasn't got the final answer for the question of the women's work load. The union executive goes back to explain the situation to the workers. They decide to continue the walk-out. The workers then go back to the factory to get those few who have remained inside. Everyone leaves the factory to picket outside--everyone, that is, except the 75 workers of the litho department.

### ALL THE WAY TO VICTORY

The walkout is complete. The workers gather in a room to discuss organization for the strike. Many workers, both men and women, participate, strike committees are formed. They also talk about discrimination against women. During this time, reps meet with bosses, who all of a sudden are very conciliatory, and agree to all the demands: two women to be added to each work team to replace women for breaks. The company also signs a paper promising there will be no reprisals.

The reps come back with the proposed agreement. The men say it's up to the women to decide; they say they'll accept the women's decision. Finally, the women vote to accept the offer, with the support of the men.

"From now on, the bosses know that we will not budge until we get what we want and what is our right..."

### INTERVIEW with Two Militants

Q. Did the struggle change the relations between the men and the women in the factory, on the level of general attitudes, the ideas people have of each other?

a.) "Now the men are more likely to take the women into consideration. Before, the women were afraid of everything. Now, this fear has been cut in half. We don't let people walk all over us like we did before."

b.) "As for the men they learned a little lesson. They thought they were the only ones who could fight. They never thought women could fight too."

a.) "Now, in our department there's less pressure. The foremen are a little easier than they were before. Before, the operators were the kings. They chose "their" girls. Now they know they can't play with us the way they did before. They know that some of the women are more aware and more conscious than some of the men."

b.) "The attitude of the men at the beginning of the struggle was that it wasn't their problem. But a lot of them changed during the struggle. They are more willing to resist now. Before, they were paternalistic toward the women; they talked about "their little girls". They saw that the women stuck it out and won. There's more solidarity now (towards the women). There are still conflicts, personal jealousy, misunderstandings, but there's still more camaraderie than before."



Q. Has the struggle changed something for the union, in terms of participation by the men and women working in the shop?

a.) "It changed for the women. Usually, there were only 3 or 4 women at the meetings. The last time there were more than 15. And the women talk more about the union amongst themselves. They ask the delegates questions. They keep informed. If there's something wrong in their department, they let the union know as quickly as possible. For instance, the question of replacement came up again. The bosses tried to put on only two girls as replacements. The women stood strong and demanded, and won, three girls as replacements."

Q. You're preparing a contract. How is it going and what do you foresee for the union?

b.) "Before, the CSN negotiators would arrive with a contract ready-made. Us, we told them we don't need them to write our contract. What we're doing is organising a campaign in the factory to prepare the contract. We gave out forms to everyone so that they can make suggestions. After, there will be 3 meetings with various workshops to discuss all the points in the contract to see if they can be improved. In general, we hope to arouse a lot of serious discussion around the contract."

a.) "Because of the improvement in the climate of discussions in the factory, the women are now able to make suggestions. We are ready to struggle to reduce the differences in salaries and working conditions. Women must be given classifications -- without that, they can't move up. We tried, recently, to propose a woman for the position of machine operator, a woman with more than 10 years of seniority. We'll see what happens. In any case, we will fight for that. The women in the union will no longer act as just some sort of "speakers" from the men to the other women."

Q. You are in a union which has workers in other factories, and also from the FTFP. Could you tell us how you see the situation there now?

b.) "At the last FTFP congress we could make out a kind of progressive opposition on the part of certain people. But it was not organized. The congresses are sort of family get-togethers where we don't really talk about our problems. However, on specific questions, for example the autonomy of the local unions, we made a little headway. We had certain clauses removed from the charter, like the one saying the local unions had to have approval from the Federation before starting a strike; like the statement "the strike is the last means (of pressure) to be used..." and other similar clauses. But business unionism is still there, and very strongly so. The president of the federation said that we have to go beyond business unionism. But for him, that means fighting against the international unions. I made an intervention. I said that that wasn't how I saw business unionism and combatative unionism. Combatative unionism recognizes that capitalism isn't here forever, and that one day it will have to go. I said we had to make a distinction between the short-term interests of the workers (economic struggles, struggles for better contracts) and their long-term interests, ie the abolition of the bosses. The president answered me saying that the bosses are here to stay, and we have to negotiate."

At this point things are pretty quiet in the other 14 factories where our union is present. Most of the places are still controlled by the old cliques. But the situation is slowly changing there as well. The contracts are better and better -- and the workers want to take things into their own hands."

## The Strike at Firestone: Women Take an Active Role

This article was written in mid-November, when the strike at Firestone was about eight months old. The strike ended in a victory for the workers in mid-January (see news brief in this issue).

A women's group has been formed around the strike at the Firestone plant in Joliette, Québec, where workers have been out for eight months.

During the summer, after the strike had been on for six months, the strikers' wives began to feel that although the struggle concerned them directly, economically and otherwise, they were isolated from it and received very little information on what was really happening. Some of them wanted to participate actively in the strike but since they feared they would be on an unequal footing with the men, they felt they could be more effective acting with other women. Seven or eight women, almost all of them mothers and full-time housewives, met informally to discuss ways in which, as a group, they could participate more directly in the strike. These women were the wives of the most militant workers, members of the Committee of Thirty, the strike committee, and, although not "politically experienced", were among the most dynamic of the wives of the Firestone workers.

The basis for the women's group was the support for the strikers; this remains the group's priority despite the fact that its aims have broadened considerably since that time. At their first meeting, the women decided to undertake certain essential technical tasks: mailing, telephone calls, etc. But soon the women decided to meet as a permanent group based on not only the strike, but also on their own oppression as women; and having taken charge of information lines, they would easily be able to reach other strikers' wives.

After several informal meetings, the group made its existence official, and presented itself to the Solidarity Committee which has been formed by a number of Montréal student, worker, and intellectual groups around the Firestone strike. The women began to meet regularly. At this point, the group is operating on two

levels: the base group of seven or eight meets Monday nights to prepare Wednesday night meetings for a larger group of 25, also all wives of the members of the Committee of Thirty. The Wednesday night meetings consist of political education and recreational activities. The political education programme is designed to help the women acquire a better understanding of capitalism and of sexual politics; a course is given in sexual hygiene, covering such questions as technical problems of contraception, abortion, etc. The group of 25 saw the film *The Salt of the Earth*, a film about a strike in the south of the United States in which the wives of the strikers come together around the strike, not only to support their husbands but also as women directly affected by the struggle; the film was enthusiastically received.

The women have contacts with militants in Montréal, but strictly for technical aid and information; they want to make their own decisions and have control over the direction the group takes. In an effort to establish links with other women in similar situations, they have made preliminary contacts with the wives of strikers at Canadian Gypsum, another Joliette plant where workers have also been on strike for about eight months.

While the Firestone groups now consider itself permanent and autonomous, that autonomy is not in any way contradictory to the workers' struggle, and the group intends to continue giving its fullest support to the strike. This means that giving technical aid and whatever other support is required is a priority for them as long as the strike lasts.

The Firestone women's group is an important development in that women have gotten together around their common oppression as women, but at the same time linking their struggle inextricably to workers' struggles.

# NEWS BRIEFS:

## Rank and File on the Offensive



In the past year Quebec has experienced a significant growth of labour militancy characterized by a number of long and hard strikes. To an unprecedented degree, these strikes have challenged not only the power of the bosses but also business unionism, which has failed to meet the real interests of rank and file workers and has limited their involvement in the decisions that affect their lives. Demands made, the manner in which struggles have been conducted, and the importance placed on solidarity with the struggles of other workers speak of a growing class consciousness in the labour movement.

### Firestone

After a ten-month-long strike, the 312 workers at the Firestone plant in Joliette have won an important victory. The company finally agreed to almost all the demands of the workers. The agreement gave the strikers all their salary demands retroactive to September 1972, French as the working language in their factory, 80% of their pay for up to 4 years in case of lay-off, and the workers can refuse to do overtime during the week and, in summer, on weekends. As well, the company agreed to drop all charges against the union and the strikers. Finally, the Firestone workers will be the first in Quebec to have May 1 as a paid holiday.

This is a very important victory. The workers, learning from their last strike where they gained nothing, had set up a "Committee of 30" to take the leadership from the union bureaucrats. This enabled the workers to establish a democratic structure controlled by the rank and file to lead the strike. This helped create strong unity among the workers. Thus, in the face of threatening letters, court actions, scabs, and police used by the company, the workers did not give in. The unity and organization was combined with a solidarity movement organized by outside groups. The solidarity movement helped raise funds to keep the strike going, and organized a boycott of Firestone stores.



This provided the means to build support amongst the working class for the strikers and enabled others to learn from the struggle at Firestone.

The Firestone workers, as they prepared to return to work, said they would

## Shellcast

Since November 19 the 40 workers at Shellcast in Montreal have been on strike. The incident which sparked the strike was the firing of one of the workers for his efforts to organize a union. Subsequently, the rest of the workers, too, were fired and sent letters indicating that they had quit voluntarily. Since then, the workers have been maintaining picket lines around the factory to try to force the company to accept their demands, especially their demand for a union.

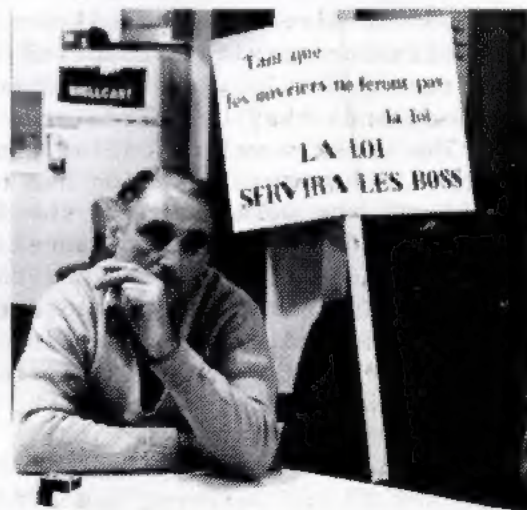
Shellcast is one of the thousands of small, ununionized companies in Quebec. The workers get \$2.50 per hour and often have to work up to 60 hours a week. There is no job security and the boss can do whatever he wants. He can increase the rate of work or the hours and fire anyone who complains. Since a large proportion of the workers are immigrants who need work badly, the boss is able to force them to work in highly exploitative conditions. The workers wanted a union to defend them from the bosses.

The workers demanded accreditation with the United Oil Workers of the Confederation of Canadian Unions. However, in December the union told the workers that it had sent a letter to Ottawa

not dismantle the organization they had set up. They would use it for further self-education and to lead the struggles to come. To show their continuing solidarity, they voted to give the money remaining in their strike fund to the striking workers at Shellcast in Montreal.

withdrawing the request for accreditation. The workers were told that the union didn't feel that it had enough control over them and the strike. The union gave the impression, according to the workers, that it didn't like "illegal strikes." Thus the workers were deprived of their union by the union itself. The vote for accreditation would have taken place January 8 and they would have won it. Before going to the U.O.W. they had gone to the Confederation of National Trade Unions, only to be told that the CNTU was too busy and that Shellcast was too small to be organized.

The struggle is continuing at Shellcast in spite of the unions. The workers have recently won the right to Unemployment Insurance benefits and will be able to continue their struggle for a while longer. A strong solidarity movement has developed around the strike, with many groups raising funds and helping maintain the picket lines. It isn't easy, as several times the bosses' scabs have attacked the picket lines with steel bars, putting several people in hospital. Invariably the police arrest picketers when such incidents take place. But the workers of Shellcast do not intend to give in.



As long as the workers don't make the laws, the laws will serve the bosses!



## Amalgamated Clothing Workers

For the first time in twenty years, Montréal members of the Amalgamated Clothing workers of America have gone on strike. The strike was a gesture from the rank-and-file, who rejected the contract accepted by the union leaders, and forced the leaders to call a strike.

The strike at its peak involved 6,000 workers in the men's clothing industry. Three thousand were 'legally' on strike. The other three thousand, whose contract expires in the fall, walked out in sympathy, but later returned to work -- because the union refused to support these 'illegal' strikers. However, during the strike, there was in effect an almost total work stoppage, because those legally on strike are a part of the production chain that extends to those who were not on strike. The result was a shortage of materials, due to the strike, leading to a general production stoppage.

The movement towards the strike began in December, when workers, frustrated with the slowness of contract negotiations began to organise slowdowns to pressure the union into action. They wanted a general assembly instead of the usual sectoral assemblies by which the union helps the bosses keep the workers separated. They organised a meeting, where 500 workers attended and drew up their own list of demands. The union bosses were forced, because of the strength of the movement, to hold a general assembly. Five thousand workers attended the meeting. They rejected the bosses' offer, an offer that the union had already accepted, voted a new negotiating committee composed in majority of rank and file workers, and put forward the demands they had formulated themselves.

The workers walked out on Monday, the 4th of February. The union had hoped to hold off the workers until the 11th of Feb., for when they had planned another general assembly, to consider the bosses' offers. The union also claimed there was no strike fund. However, again, the workers forced the union to move, forced them to hold an assembly on the 5th, where the strike was voted.

A union is supposed to represent the interests of the workers, and defend the gains the workers have forced from the bosses. But in the clothing industry in Québec, an industry which employs 68,000 workers (making



it the largest in terms of number employed) the two major unions are completely sold-out, representing the interests of the bosses more than those of the workers. Forty-eight percent of the workers in this industry are unionized, 58% of those in men's clothing. Yet the industry is notorious as an employer of 'cheap labour'; it hires mainly women and/or immigrants and Québécois, and pays as close to the minimum wage as possible. This situation could only be maintained with the aid of the unions, especially the two main unions, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, and the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, also an American union. In the ILGWU there has not been a strike in Montréal in 30 years; in the ACWA, there had not been a strike, nor a union general assembly in this city for 20 years, that is before the recent strike. In the industry, the separation of the workers is created by the structure of the industry and the work force itself (over 1,000 small shops where the work force is totally divided in terms of language and sex), but maintained by the unions which reject any kind of mass participation in the union structures, or even any participation at the base. Now this carefully created control is being broken down by the workers themselves.

The strike lasted for two weeks, while the union tried as best it could to regain its control over the rank and file. It claimed that those who pushed for the strike were revolutionnaires, it forced 3,000 workers to go back to work, thus trying to break the solidarity that had been built up, it created confusion wherever it could, about picketing, and about the organisation of the strike. This time



the workers were disorganized enough that they were forced to accept the compromise offer made by the bosses, and pushed by the union.

## United Aircraft

On January 4, the workers in Plant #1 of United Aircraft in Montreal stopped production, paraded through the factory and occupied the cafeteria. The company responded by suspending 21 workers and shutting down the factory until the following Monday morning. The union had been negotiating a new contract with the company since June 3, 1973. The workers felt that their action was the only way to force the company to begin serious negotiation.

The company decided that the workers would come in individually at different times on Monday for "interviews" with management to see if they were ready to return to work without conditions. This would enable the company to smash the union and leave all the other workers open to any arbitrary measures by the bosses. So the workers showed up at work en masse at 7 a.m. and refused to enter individually. A few did manage to get in and occupy the No. 2 plant until noon. However, "violence" broke out. A photographer employed by the company attacked one of the workers with a hatchet when the workers confiscated his camera. The "violence" enabled the company to get an injunction against Local 510 of the United Automobile Workers.

For four days the workers were locked out of United Aircraft. They were ready to return but only en masse, not individually or without the suspended workers. The company refused to negotiate. On January 9 the workers declared a strike. They were no longer willing to fool around with the

But important first steps were taken in breaking the hegemony of the union bosses, and developing militant rank and file organisation in the industry.

company but demanded that the collective agreement under negotiation for so long be settled. They want the company to agree the right of the workers to their union and to stop trying to break it. As well, they want wages tied to rises in the cost of living and the right to voluntary overtime.

The company has responded in typical fashion. In spite of profits of \$50.6 million in 1972 for its parent company United Aircraft of the United States, the management declared that it could not afford to give in to demands for higher wages. As well, it said the men would lose their jobs if the strike continued because U.A. would lose all its business. Not content with these threats, the company took out full-page newspaper ads (which it doesn't mind spending money on) to turn people against the workers. It also called in the police and provoked several incidents on the picket lines for which the workers were blamed.

However the workers are not taken in by such tactics. They have learned from Firestone and are setting up committees lead the strike and to build solidarity. Again the wives of the workers have established their own support committee and taken an active role in picketing. Other groups such as the Champlain Teachers Union have been active in building support and raising money for the strike. Support is coming in from other unions and groups. The strike looks like it could be a long one but the workers are united and prepared to continue as long it takes to win.



*Solidaire*



